Talent vs. Practice

Have you ever seen your favorite guitarists tear up a fret board without even seemingly trying?

Do you think they got that way because they were lucky, or because they were born into it?

Let me both disappoint and liberate you at the same time with the answer. **One guitar player isn't any luckier than another or born into playing licks easier than another.** If you were to take the top guitar players of each genre and find out how much they have practiced and how much they continually practice, it would be quite mind boggling. Is it a coincidence that only the great players are the ones that practice so much?

Obviously, you can see where I'm headed with this. Guitar players who have been playing for a long time and still have not progressed past a certain point, have not done so because of lack of talent; they've not done so because of their lack of practice!

If it makes you feel better to believe that Eddie Van Halen or any of the other great guitar players were born with a gift that you were not born with, then believe away only to the detriment of your own playing.

However, it's NOT the truth and that type of small thinking will hinder your playing exponentially. Don't believe the lie!

This is a subject that is rarely addressed or, often times, misunderstood completely. The definition of "talent" is a natural aptitude or skill. As far as practice goes, we all know what practice is and that doing more of it makes us better at whatever skill we are trying to improve. I know I'm going to step on some toes with this portion of the book, but bear with me because I promise you that what I am going to share with you in this section will only empower you to become the best player that you allow yourself to be.

Simply put, the point of this section is that the belief that you must be born talented or have some natural inclination to excel above the herd is not only completely false, but also extremely limiting to your playing… and your life!

Many people believe so fervently in this idea of an innate need for talent – as opposed to sheer practice – that they talk themselves right out of excellence! Defenders of the talent theory like to use examples of great icons that excel in a particular field or genre and say "there, you can't tell me that they are not talented!" They *assume* that the person was simply born with the ability they are displaying in their excellent performance.

This assumption, however, is very insulting and negates the thousands – or even tens of

thousands of hours – that a person has spent "perfecting" their craft.

What do Jimi Hendrix, Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan and Thomas Edison all have in common? Well, depending on who you ask, some might say they were gifted or talented. Others who have taken the time to step back, will realize that their gains are because of dedication, innovation, organization and perseverance. They understand that **the more one practices, the better one gets.**

Now I know that concept sounds logical, but see if you can step outside yourself for a moment and watch yourself slip into the "talent camp" when something appears to be out of your reach.

What I'm saying is, and I know this from personal experience because I used to do it often, it's easy to look at someone who has **"mastered his craft"** and say that they have some leg up on you. I've done it so many countless times throughout my life. I used to do it most often with musicians, but my love of illusions (magic), martial arts, etc., have also made me assume that somebody had a hidden key that I was not able to find.

I have played guitar for several decades now, have learned thousands of songs and have attempted to imitate hundreds of guitar players. I have seen success in all of these areas. I've had many people comment on how "talented" I am. The funny thing is, when I started playing guitar, I was *TERRIBLE!* Why is that?

It is that way because everybody is terrible when they just pick up the guitar! It's just that some folks forgot the process and how long it actually took them. Jimi Hendrix was terrible when he first picked up the guitar! Eric Clapton was terrible when he first picked up the guitar! Yngwie Malmsteen was terrible when he first picked up the guitar!

Are you getting the picture?

We would be much better off to replace the word talent with perseverance. Now that is a pill I can swallow! If someone said to me "the reason that a particular player does not play as well as Jimi Hendrix is because he doesn't have the talent," I would <u>never</u> concur. If someone said to me, "the reason that someone does not play as well as Jimi Hendrix is because they don't have the same perseverance that he had," I would wholeheartedly agree!

Perhaps to define it better, instead of the word perseverance we could even replace it with "efficient practice time." Now how unromantic is that? I know, it kind of makes you want to call it "talent" again right? How much cooler to think that we would not have to work and that we could just be born into such a thing. Let's not fall into the trap. It's lame and it's lazy and it's <u>NOT the truth</u>.

Jimi Hendrix started playing guitar somewhere around 10 years old. If he were so "talented", he would not have had to practice so much? Why didn't we hear of him breaking into the music

scene at 10 or 11? What about Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan and Thomas Edison? Mozart was known to utterly surround himself with music. He was constantly immersed in it from a very young age. It's true that some people catch "the music bug" earlier than others, giving them several years more practice than others. That is a truism that you can't escape.

If someone starts playing guitar at age 4 as opposed to age 14, when both reach the age of 15 the one guitarist will have been practicing for 11 years while the other will have been practicing for one year. It's simple math. Can you see which player might sound better? Is this what we're calling talented?

I heard a story about Michael Jordan where he did not make the high school basketball team because he SUCKED! YES, that Michael Jordan!

However he was determined to play basketball. So he got that basketball out and started shooting hoops and still sucked for a bit, until continuous suckyness turned into kind of sucking, which turned into not so sucky, which turned into kind of good which turned into pretty good which turned into the best NBA basketball player to ever grace the courts!

Have you got it yet? It DOES NOT happen overnight! He made his own destiny by being determined and practicing. In essence he became talented.

What about Thomas Edison? Who the heck is that you ask? He's the guy that invented the light bulb. Yep, pretty important huh? He also invented hundreds of other things that we use today. Look him up on Google if you want to see a man who has changed the lives of billions of people.

When Thomas Edison was creating the light bulb he used hundreds of different filaments before finding the right one. The filament of the light bulb is that little thing in the middle that glows. He used everything under the sun including horsehair but to no avail. Finally he got it right. Enter sarcastic Sage voice, "Boy, that talented Thomas Edison. He is just so lucky. Stuff just comes to him SOOO easily." Can you see how insulting that is when he worked his hind end off to create such a technology?

In fact, it was Thomas Edison who said, "genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration" or in my words 1% talent and 99% practice. So that little 1% seed that was dropped into Jimi Hendrix, Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison and YOU, must be watered and fed and given all the conditions to make that seed grow into fruition. That's the harder part. Seeds like that are dropped all day long but rarely do they find fertile ground. If you've gotten this far in my diatribe, I would guess YOU are fertile ground and are going to run with this information.

There is NO-thing stopping YOU from becoming the next Jimi Hendrix or Eddie Van Halen IF you practice like they did. THAT'S the tricky part. You were already born into this world with the ability!

Now that you know this, I want you to be aware of how you view great accomplishments. It does take a little bit of the wonderment away, but empowers you to create that wonderment for yourself. There is no task too great, or goal too lofty that you cannot attain if properly mapped out and walked through step-by-step.

This is not a pep talk, as I rarely have time for pep talks. This is a truism and is good news for those of us that are willing to work hard and smart. It's *bad news* for those that are waiting for talent or the Publisher's Clearinghouse sweepstakes guy with a big check to knock on their front door. Now, DON'T go easy on yourself. Go practice as if you are the next Jimi Hendrix, because you ARE!